PS239: Formal Models of Political Development

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Course details:
Class time: Tuesday, 11:00 - 1:00.

Course Description and Objectives

Across the substantive fields of political science, scholars try to ascertain why the political world looks like it does. A large portion of this inquiry is about the institutions that comprise the political world. We would like to know where these institutions came from, when and why they are stable, how and why they change, and how we can promote the ones we like. Political development pertains to these questions of change and stability in political institutions.

In this course we will explore how formal theory has contributed to this discussion, as well as important elements of political development which formal theory has so far overlooked. Since change and stability occur in time, most of our readings emphasize particular historical contexts in which some specific development occurred. We can and should critique the representation of that history whenever possible. However, our primary focus is theoretical: how do we think about development using the methods of formal theory, and how can we do it better?

This is a Ph.D.-level course. It is an elective in the formal theory sequence. This course will develop students' ability to read and critique formal models, and to apply formal theory to analyze important political developments in their own areas of research.

Format

The class sessions will mix presentation of papers with seminar-style discussions of the papers, their models, and their substantive contributions. Since this is officially a methodology class, we will focus in depth on the models, how they work, and how well they express key political conditions.

Readings

The readings will consist mostly of journal articles and books with a few working papers mixed in. They are listed below for each session. Readings will be distributed as either links or PDF documents via email. Several books are on the reading list but you
will not have to purchase any. Most are available as e-books through the UC library; I will email a pre-publication proof of mine.

**Important Note.** As befits an advanced Ph.D. seminar, this course covers an evolving field with no standard canon. I would like to expand my own awareness of what is in the literature, and to incorporate papers that students find interesting. If you know of a paper on political development that is not on the schedule below, and contains a model, please let me know. I am particularly interested in papers by women and scholars of color.

**Requirements, Expectations, and Grading**

All of the models in this course are based on noncooperative game theory. It is important to have some grasp of game theory to fully understand the material. Treatment at the level of PS 232A-B is ideal; 232A alone is adequate.

The requirements of the course are as follows.

1. In order for class presentation and discussion to be useful, it is imperative that students read the assigned papers at least once before each session (week 1 excepted). It might also be instructive to read them again after the session.

2. Each student will lead the class for one week. This will involve presenting one paper from that week’s readings in detail and leading discussion of the week’s readings. The instructor will do the presentations in the remaining weeks. We will divide readings/sessions among students in the first class session.

3. When not presenting, students are expected to be fully and constructively engaged in discussion and critique of the models presented. In this class and every other, to “critique” does not mean to “savage” or “destroy.” It means to give a balanced assessment of what worked in a model, what did not, what was overlooked, and what can be improved.

4. Each student must submit a final paper by the end of reading week. It must be at least 15 pages double spaced with 1 inch margins. It should identify an important case of development in your research area, review other research that explains this development (or similar ones in other contexts), and sketch an original model that can add something to that explanation. *Students should schedule an appointment to meet with me to talk about the paper before spring break.*

Each of these components will count equally in the final course grade.

**Schedule**

The week-by-week reading schedule is below. Note that we will not have class on March 26 (spring break) or April 2 (instructor out of town).
1. Introduction.


2. Democracy as a commitment


3. Self-enforcing democracy


4. Self-enforcing rule of law (M. Lee)


5. Self-enforcing institutions

6. Legislative power (D. Foster)


7. Bureaucracies (J. Kim)


9. State capacity I (P. Gupta)

10. State capacity II (A. McCall)

11. States and security (J. Warren)

12. Norms, Identities, and Values (J. Li)

13. Path dependence and policymaking (A. Benn)